What is claimed is:

1. A composition comprising at least one pharmaceutically active agent and an enhancer containing one or more of N,N-dimethylglycine, thioctic acid, sebacic acid, shikimic acid, and salts thereof.
2. The composition of claim 1, wherein the active agent is one whose absorption is increased in the presence of said enhancer.
3. The composition of claim 1, wherein the enhancer is present in the composition in an amount effective to increase the biological absorption of the active agent.
4. The composition of claim 3, wherein the concentration of the enhancer is from about 0.01% to about 99% by weight.
5. The composition of claim 4, wherein the concentration of enhancer is from about 0.01% to about 50% by weight.
6. The composition of claim 4, wherein the concentration of enhancer is from about 0.1% to about 30% by weight.
7. The composition of claim 1, which comprises at least one pharmaceutically active agent and N,N-dimethylglycine or its salt.
8. The composition of claim 1, which comprises at least one pharmaceutically active agent and thioctic acid or its salt.
9. The composition of claim 1, which comprises at least one pharmaceutically active agent and sebacic acid or its salt.
10. The composition of claim 1, which comprises at least one pharmaceutically active agent and thioctic acid or its salt.

11. The composition of claim 1, wherein the active agent is a protein, peptide, or nucleic acid.

12. The composition of claim 1, wherein the active agent is selected from sampatrilat and hydrochlorothiazide.

13. The composition of claim 1, which is an oral pharmaceutical in the form of a liquid, suspension, emulsion, powder, pill, tablet, capsule, gel caps, troche, cachet or pellet.

14. The composition of claim 1, which is in the form of a solution, suspension, aerosol, or emulsion, which can be sprayed or inhaled.

15. A method for enhancing the absorption of a pharmaceutically active agent across a mucosal membrane in a mammal, comprising administering to the mammal a composition comprising at least one active agent and an enhancer containing one or more of N,N-dimethylglycine, thioctic acid, sebacic acid, shikimic acid, and salts thereof.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the active agent is one whose bioavailability is increased in the presence of said enhancer.

17. The method of claim 13, wherein the enhancer is present in the composition in an amount effective to increase the bioavailability of the active agent.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the concentration of the enhancer is from about 0.01% to about 99% by weight.

19. The method of claim 16, wherein the concentration of the enhancer is from about 0.01% to about 50% by weight.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the concentration of the enhancer is from about 0.1% to about 30% by weight.

21. The method of claim 13, wherein the mucosal membrane is the gastrointestinal tract and the composition is administered orally, buccally or sublingually.

22. The method of claim 18, wherein the composition is administered orally.

23. A process for preparing the composition of claim 1, comprising bringing into association at least one pharmaceutically active agent with one or more enhancer, and forming a liquid, suspension, emulsion, aerosol, powder, pill, tablet, capsule, gel caps, troche, cachet or pellet therewith.

24. The process of claim 23, which further comprises adding a pharmaceutical carrier or carrier to the active agent and enhancer.

25. A process for testing the potency of an absorption enhancer in vitro, comprising:

(a) growing a confluent monolayer of Caco-2 cells on a permeable support in a culture chamber with apical and basolateral sides;

(b) adding a drug selected from sampatrilat or hydrochlorothiazide concurrently or sequentially with a potential enhancer compound to the apical side of the chamber;

(c) after a predetermined time measuring the amount of drug that passes from the apical side to the basolateral side of the chamber; and

(d) comparing the measurement from step (c) with a measurement obtained from the addition of drug alone to the apical side of the chamber,

whereby the magnitude of any increase is an indication of the potency of the enhancer.